

Information on **Viral (Aseptic) Meningitis**



WHAT IS VIRAL MENINGITIS? An infection which results in swelling of the tissues covering the brain and spinal cord and is caused by one of several different viruses.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS? Symptoms of meningitis may not be the same for every person. Common symptoms include: sudden onset of fever, stiff neck, severe headache, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, sore throat, upper respiratory infection and aching muscles. Other symptoms may include photophobia (bright light hurts the eyes), drowsiness or confusion. In babies, the symptoms are more difficult to identify. They may include fever, fretfulness or irritability, difficulty in awakening the baby or the baby refuses to eat.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I SUSPECT I HAVE VIRAL MENINGITIS? *See a doctor!*

HOW IS VIRAL MENINGITIS SPREAD?

Viral meningitis can be spread in two ways:

1. Viruses (such as group B coxsackieviruses and echoviruses) can cause up to 90% of viral meningitis cases and are often spread through direct contact with respiratory secretions (e.g., saliva, sputum, or nasal mucus) which can be spread through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes.
2. Viruses can also be found in the intestines of an infected person and can be shed in the stool (feces) when a person has a bowel movement. The viruses can get on the infected person's hands when they use the toilet or after changing an infected baby's dirty diapers. If they do not wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water after a bowel movement or changing diapers, the viruses may spread to others, almost always by way of food.

WHEN DO THE FIRST SIGNS OF ILLNESS OCCUR? Usually 3 to 7 days after being infected.

WHEN IS A PERSON WITH VIRAL MENINGITIS CONTAGIOUS? From about 3 days after becoming infected to 10 days after symptoms appear. Some viruses may be shed in feces for up to 3 weeks.

WHAT SHOULD A PERSON DO AFTER BEING EXPOSED? Typically, fewer than 1 of every 1,000 persons infected actually develop viral meningitis. Therefore, an individual in close contact with someone with viral meningitis has a moderate chance of becoming infected, but a very small chance of developing meningitis. Household members and close contacts should be carefully observed. If they develop symptoms with a fever, they should be promptly seen by their doctor, and they should tell their doctor that they are a close contact of a patient with viral meningitis.

HOW CAN THE SPREAD OF VIRAL MENINGITIS BE PREVENTED?

- Cover the mouth and nose with disposable tissues when coughing or sneezing.
- Only use disposable tissues to wipe noses and wash hands after using them.
- Wash hands thoroughly after using the toilet or changing diapers.
- Don't share food, drinks, or eating utensils.

WHAT IS THE TREATMENT FOR VIRAL MENINGITIS? There is no specific curative treatment for viral meningitis.

If you have additional questions, please call your doctor or local health department

Central District Health Department

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